



# CAMP PEMIGEWASSETT

## Camp Pemigewassett's DEI Initiative: Interim Report, April 2021

*Note: What follows contains language drafted as part of the DEI Survey Report by members of Pemi's DEI Committee. Thanks especially to Lisa Heller and Abby Reed for their written contributions.*

### Survey Timeline

Last June, Camp Pemi formed the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee amid our nation's long-overdue reckoning with racial injustice. Despite 112 years of "good will of the heart," we recognized the pressing need to acknowledge underlying equity issues that we had not addressed, and we committed ourselves to making concrete changes to ensure Pemi is a safe, welcoming, and nurturing place for all.

The DEI Committee was chaired by Dan Reed and included Jonathan H. Fauver, Dwight Dunston, Abby Reed, Danny Kerr, and recently appointed Pemi Board members Lisa Heller and Burgie Howard. Their first initiative was to survey alumni, staff, current parents, and current campers to better understand the Pemi experience from a wide variety of perspectives.

Over the course of three months once the survey results were in, the DEI Committee worked both as a whole group and in small subcommittees to analyze the data. Their report to the Board, delivered in February 2021, summarized the Committee's findings as distilled from the survey and yielded 49 specific recommendations for Pemi moving forward.

### Respondents and Perspectives

In total, 239 members of the Pemi community responded to the survey—174 alumni and/or staff, 56 parents, and 9 campers—providing us with a wealth of useful information.

Interestingly, 50% of the respondents who chose to enter their ages were older than 50, with 63% older than 40. As a result, those who were alumni may to a degree reflect a Pemi that *was* as much as the Pemi that *is*, in comments both glowing and critical. The Board will be very attentive to this possibility as it moves forward.

### A Strong Institution Can Become Even Better

Representing experiences that spanned decades of time, responses to the survey were overwhelmingly supportive and affirmed many of the positive impacts Pemi has had on campers and staff over the years. The value of the survey, however, was to look beyond the straight statistics summarizing the views of a largely homogenous and satisfied population and try to hear the perspectives of the Pemi community as a whole, including those outside that homogenous group. In this way, the survey yielded many suggestions extending beyond the simple idea of diversity and geared towards creating a more inclusive experience overall.

The data analysis from the survey was comprehensive and highly granular, but several overarching areas--each with general and specific associated recommendations--emerged that are worth examining as we look toward progress and improvement. All speak to deepening the culture of inclusivity at Pemi. Let us list and say a few brief words about them before moving on to the recommendations and the process the Board has put in place to address them.

**Program Language and Practices:** As is true of many long-established camps, Pemi programming includes some vestiges of camp life from a different era with numerous examples of language and the unwarranted and insensitive use of Native American terminology that no longer pass muster at an institution striving for inclusivity.

**The Evolving Experience of Women at Camp:** The role of women at Pemi has expanded greatly over the years (see *Utopia Reconsidered*, 2019). Nevertheless, several comments suggested more attention be paid to showing appropriate and respectful treatment of the female staff—and to referring to women in general in appropriate and respectful ways—providing more opportunities to model for campers how to develop healthy attitudes towards and interactions with women.

**Racial and Other Types of Diversity:** Respondents noted the lack of diversity in the camper and staff populations as problematic in several ways, including the additional challenges and burden it presents for the underrepresented group. “Tokenism” can dampen appreciation for diversity as well as opportunities to grow from exposure to other perspectives. Underrepresentation can also deter both campers and staff from feeling comfortable about full participation.

**LGBTQ+ Acceptance:** Parents, alumni, and staff alike expressed the desire for a safe environment that welcomes a broader spectrum of gender identity and sexual orientation. Some staff—especially from years past—felt like there was a “don't ask, don't tell” culture around being LGBTQ+. Suggestions in this area were directed towards providing more support for growth, self-knowledge, and comfortable social integration.

**Emphasis on Athletic Achievement and Inclusivity:** While the past decade has seen significant development in defining and balancing the roles of Pemi’s 4 main program areas—Sports, Nature, The Arts, and Trips—Pemi’s traditional focus on appreciation for individual achievement in sports contributed to feelings of exclusion for those who value other areas of skill, community, and achievement. Suggestions in this area included showing an equal respect and appreciation for other areas of accomplishment by encouraging and celebrating non-sports achievements.

**Socioeconomics and Elitism:** The description of Pemi as a traditionally white male-oriented and elite environment came through with references such as “patrician” and “old boy” as well as questions about access to gear, clothing, outside experiences, open house homes, and college affiliations.

**Staff Training and Mentorship:** Staff are often young people themselves and frequently cited the need for additional guidance from training or from senior leaders to help them navigate challenging situations with campers and peers.

## **The DEI Committee’s Recommendations**

As noted above, the Committee passed along to the Board 49 discrete recommendations for making Pemi a more diverse, respectful, and inclusive community. They also conducted a straw poll among themselves to rank those recommendations in terms of importance and urgency in order to help the Board prioritize its discussion and response. These are the Committee’s top ten recommendations, beginning with the most highly ranked:

1. Diversify campers and staff through recruiting and other outreach efforts.
2. Provide explicit staff training for creating an inclusive culture, including DEI topics such as LGBTQ+ awareness and support, income/class sensitivity, exaggerated and inappropriate ('toxic') ideas of masculinity, providing social-emotional support to marginalized campers, conflict resolution, unintended harm, and welcoming conversations about acknowledging and processing differences.
3. Examine salary structure to make working at Pemi a viable option for qualified candidates - especially BIPOC - with financial need.
4. Reflect on the socio-economic gaps that exist between campers at Pemi.
5. Provide staff training on conscious and unconscious bias and discrimination, anti-racism, and anti-sexism.

6. Review overtly discriminatory, violent, or anachronistic language in Mess Hall songs and chants.
7. Reconsider unrepresentative (and at times culturally biased) Gilbert and Sullivan productions as the cornerstone of the Pemi drama program (*The Mikado* of particular note), in favor of a more diverse repertoire.
8. Eliminate any targeting and all discriminatory language in *Bean Soup* and provide additional editorial guidance prohibiting insensitive or offensive contributions.
9. Consider affinity groups and mentoring so that underrepresented campers and staff do not feel like "pioneers" or tokens.
10. Promote respect of and trust in female staff (e.g., as athletic coaches, overseeing dining room tables, cabin coverage); incorporate more female perspectives in decisions; continue recent efforts to hire women in visible leadership roles, including upper management; examine roles expected of and exclusive to women at camp.

### **The Pemi Board Response to Date**

The Board began its review and discussion of the Committee's report and recommendations at its March 2, 2021 meeting and formed four Action Groups (based on related themes in the Committee's recommendations) to start to address these recommendations. Each of those groups include a Board member who served on the DEI Committee, an additional Board member, one other member in a relevant role at Pemi (e.g. a woman on the group addressing women's role at camp, and the Head of Staff on the group treating staff training), and Pat Clare, the newly-appointed Assistant Director whose portfolio includes the coordination of all DEI matters at Pemi.

The charge of each Action Group was to meet as soon as practicable; examine the primary recommendations (above) for short- and long-term treatment; subsequently examine the rest of the 49 recommendations for those which fall into the group's focused purview and devise strategies and schedule for treating them; arrange with the directors for the immediate implementation of "no-brainer" initiatives; seek full Board approval for more substantial or controversial initiatives; report back to the Board at every regular Board meeting; and offer major reports on their work at 2022's late-winter/early-spring face-to-face meeting.

Each of the Action Groups has now met and has begun its work, the "Diversity" group taking on one recommendation beyond the "top ten" that the Board thought it was important to prioritize: i.e. *Connect with Native American history and culture in general and the Abenaki community in particular, such as land acknowledgement and appropriate indigenous language and imagery*. The meetings have been productive and stimulating and they have begun to generate a road map for concrete actions to be taken over the coming weeks and months. Some of the "fixes" can be quick—further review and updating of the traditional mess hall songs, for example, or reconsidering the name of the camp toilet buildings. Others may be determined to be impractical, unnecessary, or undesirable. Others—particularly continuing to build the diversity of the camper and staff population—will clearly take multiple years to bring to fruition. We feel, though, that practical and achievable plans are in the process of formation and implementation. We will offer regular updates on our progress.

### **In Closing...for Now**

We'll close by offering great thanks to all of those who responded to the survey and to the DEI Committee that went to such extraordinary lengths to compile, process, and present a remarkable—and remarkably useful—array of data. We welcome questions, suggestions, and responses, and encourage anyone who is interested in learning more about the Committee's methodology or in accessing the results in more tangible forms to be in touch with Dan Reed, at [dan@camppepi.com](mailto:dan@camppepi.com).

Dan Reed, Chair, DEI Committee  
Tom Reed, Jr., President of the Board